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times than at off peak yet the trains are still packed to bursting point during the rush hour simply because we have to be at work for a certain time. If congestion has no effect on rail passengers why should it work on the roads? The fact is that congestion is self regulating. Drivers will not sit in their cars regardless of how long the daily commute takes but will actively seek the quickest route to their destination to the point of changing their mode of travel, their job or moving house. Simply increasing the cost of that journey is a very crude and ineffective congestion tool compared to reducing the demand for road space by flexible working practices, home working or staggering school opening times.

Both AGMA and the Government have stated that their intention is to move to a distance based satellite tracking system as soon as possible. This will entail the junking of a tag and beacon system outlined



in the current proposals and another massive outlay in capital costs to be funded by the motorist. A satellite tracking system will record and retain data about our movements for up to five years and we face the prospect of that data being sold to 'concerned parties' as is the case with our personal details held at the DVLA.

As a nation we are already the most watched country in the world, this scheme will be a large step towards the surveillance society outlined in George Orwell's *1984*. If our position is known at all times then the speed at which we are traveling can also be worked out.

The Manchester Congestion charge plans have little to do with solving congestion and will actually make congestion worse because of plans to implement bus lanes on all major routes into Manchester. We will have no say in where or when the charges will be set or how much they will be. Indeed there are no checks or balances built into the system whatsoever, just the increasing consolidation of power over our daily lives in the hands of fewer people. As a society we will truly be tagged, tracked and taxed off the road.

Sean Corker is the coordinator for Manchester Against Road Tolls - If you want to show your support sign the online petition at: www.manchestertolltax.com



Don't panic, rejoice

Local authorities argue that we're in for a...

For the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities congestion charging is a just part of the bigger picture: the soft underbelly so to speak and an easy target to attack. In other-words congestion charging is used by the anti-lobby as a cheap scare tactic or even a deliberate mis-reading of the plans to frighten the public. The emphasis should instead, AGMA think, be on the '£3 billion investment programme' that could be coming Greater Manchester's way: nothing short of 'a transport revolution'.

Feast on this table AGMA is saying. Before, yes, before, any congestion charging would hit, we would get, or be well on the way to getting, 30km of new Metrolink lines, more Bus Rapid Transit lanes, a new 21km dedicated busway between Leigh, Salford and Manchester, better trains, improved stations, six new transport interchanges, a bypass for Ashton-under-Lyne, more park and rides, better passenger information delivery, better security and 'hundreds' of new yellow school buses for hectic school-run time.



And not only that - and you have to have sympathy with AGMA about the downright mis-information flying around - any congestion charging would be for very limited periods not all day. Thus there would be no congestion charging between 9.30am and 4.30pm and none at weekends and evenings.

There would be two rings around the central areas of the conurbation with an outer ring on the M60 and an intermediate one further in. To cross the outer ring in the morning towards the city centre would be £2 and the inner ring £1. In the evening

it would be £1 to cross the inner ring and the same to cross the outer. The charges wouldn't apply if you were traveling the other way at those times.

Aside from the specifics the argument goes that if we adopt these proposals and get them approved then Greater Manchester would be at the cutting edge of where transport infrastructure is heading. This would make us more competitive in the global economy and thus more likely to attract investment. It would mean tens of thousands of

jobs are retained and tens of thousands more gained.

Oh, and, almost as an after-thought, it would help us cut carbon emissions locally.

It's a win, win and win again situation, so what are we waiting for?

And waiting might be the right word. After the consultation, if that goes well, there will be the Government to convince, the money to be gathered, the projects got under way and so forth. By 2012 we might see real changes happening, but it will be a long road, as AGMA hopes, to those clearer roads.